

## Part VII 1960-1975

Integration of the Wilmington Public Library was peaceful and orderly, but it took three years to accomplish.

African-American students from Williston High School who asked for Wilmington Light Infantry Memorial Library



Wilmington Colored Library

privileges were referred to the City Manager. In January 1960 three students met with Manager James R. Benson. He told them that they should request books from the Wilmington Public Library through the Wilmington Colored Library, reinforcing

a policy that had been in place since a group of Williston students asked for library cards in 1959.

Although criticized as troublemakers by community and authorities during this era of unrest, the students continued to ask peacefully to use the Market Street library. In September 1961 they were allowed to use the library on Tuesday afternoons from 5:30 to 6:30 to do their homework; they were informed, however, that official integration had to be approved by the City Council.

### Integration at Last

On October 16, 1962, the City Council voted to begin integrated services immediately. Notification had been received that state aid funds would be cut off if a resolution making the change were not adopted.

The headline in the October 20, 1960, *Wilmington Journal* read **Race Bars Drop at Local Library**. The accompanying article thanked Burdell Harvey and Leo Shepard, local NAACP officials and civic workers, for helping to knock down another racial barrier.



F. J. Rogers

Within three months, library cards had been registered to 44 African-American taxpayers.

In July 1963 the city council combined the budgets of the Wilmington Public Library and the Wilmington Colored Library. The Red Cross Street library became a branch library, and bookmobile services were extended to African-Americans.

The two library boards were combined, with Professor F. J. Rogers and George Norman representing the African-American community.

### New Faces

In 1960 the WLI building was finally air-conditioned in time for the season, and Miss Anne Green was hired as children's librarian.

Miss Green had previously worked for a New York publisher and was scheduled to have



Wilmington Light Infantry Memorial Library  
Children's Department

of a missing mare, was aimed at nine to twelve year old readers.

Both Green and the book were instant success stories in Wilmington. The children's department found unprecedented popularity under her charge. In 1962 *The Valley Cup*, her second equestrian theme book, was published. When asked why both the main characters in her novels were boys, she explained

that she noticed that "girls will read a book on a subject that they are interested in, regardless of the sex of the character. Boys almost never take home a book with even a picture of a girl on the jacket."

Miss Green, who remained in her position until 1967, wrote one more book—*Good-Bye Gray Lady*.

In 1965 Librarian Katherine Howell hired the first extension services librarian. The idea for outreach programs became popular during President Lyndon Johnson's push for a Great Society. Extension librarians took the books to people who could not ordinarily get to the library.



Joan Cobbs Coco

The program focused on the young and the elderly. Lucy Parker, who was hired in 1970, spent her career working in this beloved community service.

In 1967, Joan Cobbs (longtime library employee, Joan Coco) became the first African-American hired to work in the WLI library. A high school student, she filed catalog cards and was paid by Opportunities Inc., a

